LEARNING FROM STUDENT VOICE:

How prepared do students feel for college and career?

The national high school graduation rate has continued to rise – but do students feel prepared for what comes next?

To help answer this question, YouthTruth analyzed survey responses from over 55,000 high school students. The data was gathered between September 2015 and December 2016 through YouthTruth's anonymous online climate and culture survey administered in partnership with public school districts across 21 states. Our analysis looked at a subset of questions relating to college and career readiness and uncovered some key insights.

1 Most students want to go to college.

2 Only 1 in 2 students feel academically prepared for college.

3 Students find support services helpful — but most aren't using them.

4 Feelings of readiness vary widely across schools.

🖥 youthtruthsurvey.org

🐦 @youth_truth

1 Most students want to go to college.

The majority of students surveyed — 84 percent — report that they want to go to college. This is affirming of the college-going culture of schools across the country. However, when asked about their plans after high school, only 68 percent of students expect to attend either a 2-year college (13 percent) or 4-year college (55 percent) after they finish high school.
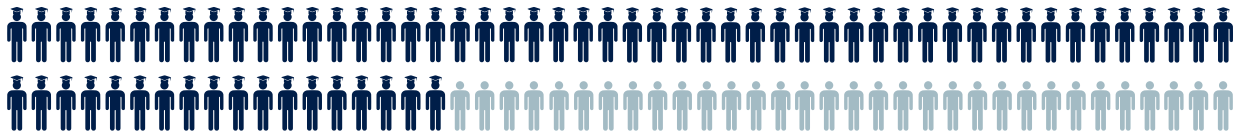
Do you want to go to college?

84% Yes **11**% I'm not sure **5**% No

After you finish high school, what do you expect to do next?

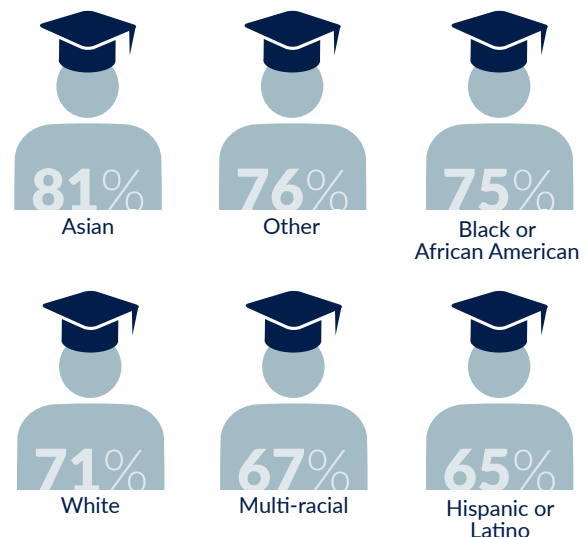**68**% Attend a 2-year or 4-year college

When we disaggregate the data by students' self-reported race and ethnicity, we see some slight differences. When asked about their plans after high school, Asian, white, and black or African-American students are slightly more likely to expect to attend a 2-year or 4-year college, while Hispanic or Latino students are slightly less likely to report that they expect to attend a 2-year or 4-year college.

▷ PRACTITIONER TIP

Educators find the ability to disaggregate data by student demographics helpful. "As our district makes significant gains toward preparing all students for college and career, we examine the specific experiences of our students to tailor and enhance their education. This allows us to better understand what our students are looking for as they discover and begin to pursue their passions," said **Gudiel R. Crosthwaite, Ph.D., Superintendent of Lynwood Unified School District i**n southern California. "We use YouthTruth data to help us instill within our students the mindset that college is a requirement and to focus our resources where they will have the greatest impact. This data allows us to better understand the college-going culture of our schools and engage in a conversation about where the path between goals and plans diverge for students."

Percentage of students who expect to attend a 2-year or 4-year college

81% Asian

76% Other

75% Black or African American

71% White

67% Multi-racial

65% Hispanic or Latino

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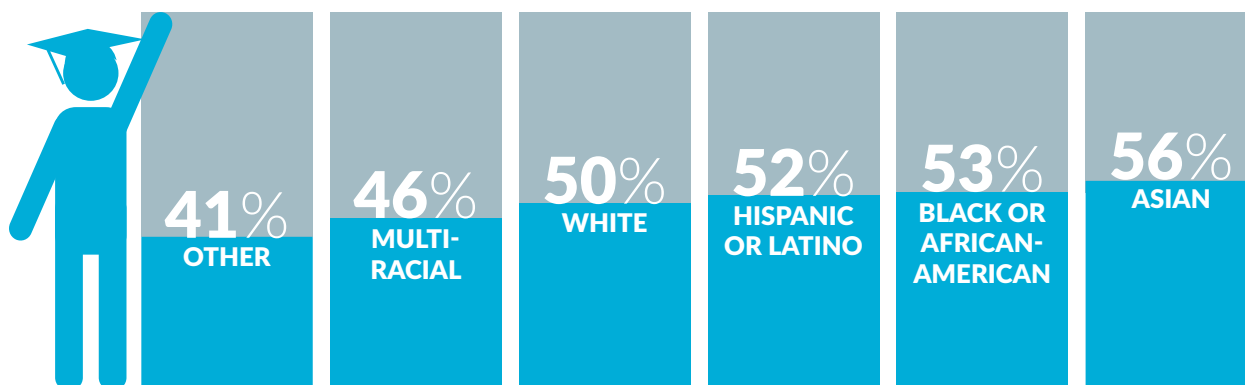# Only 1 in 2 students feel academically prepared for college.

Across all student demographics, only about half of the students surveyed feel that their school has helped them develop the skills and knowledge they will need for college-level classes. We again see some slight differences between students of different demographic groups.

The percentage of students who report feeling prepared for college hovers around 50 percent across all grade levels. Only 52 percent of 9th graders, 49 percent of 10th graders, 50 percent of 11th graders, and 50 percent of 12th graders feel that their school has helped them develop the skills and knowledge they will need for college-level classes. What is striking is that this percentage remains constant even as students get closer to high school graduation.

My school has helped me develop the skills and knowledge I will need for college-level classes.

9TH GRADE	**52%**	11TH GRADE	**50%**
10TH GRADE	**49%**	12TH GRADE	**50%**

When examining the data by students' self-reported race and ethnicity, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and black or African-American students are slightly more likely to feel that their school has helped them develop the skills and knowledge they will need for college-level classes.

41% OTHER
46% MULTI-RACIAL
50% WHITE
52% HISPANIC OR LATINO
53% BLACK OR AFRICAN-AMERICAN
56% ASIAN

The Student Perspective...

"I feel like once I get to college, I won't be as prepared as I would have wanted to be. I don't feel prepared for the transition I will have to make for college."

Anonymous High School Student

"The things we learn help us pass tests so we can get a good grade, but we don't learn basic skills for studying that will help us survive in college.
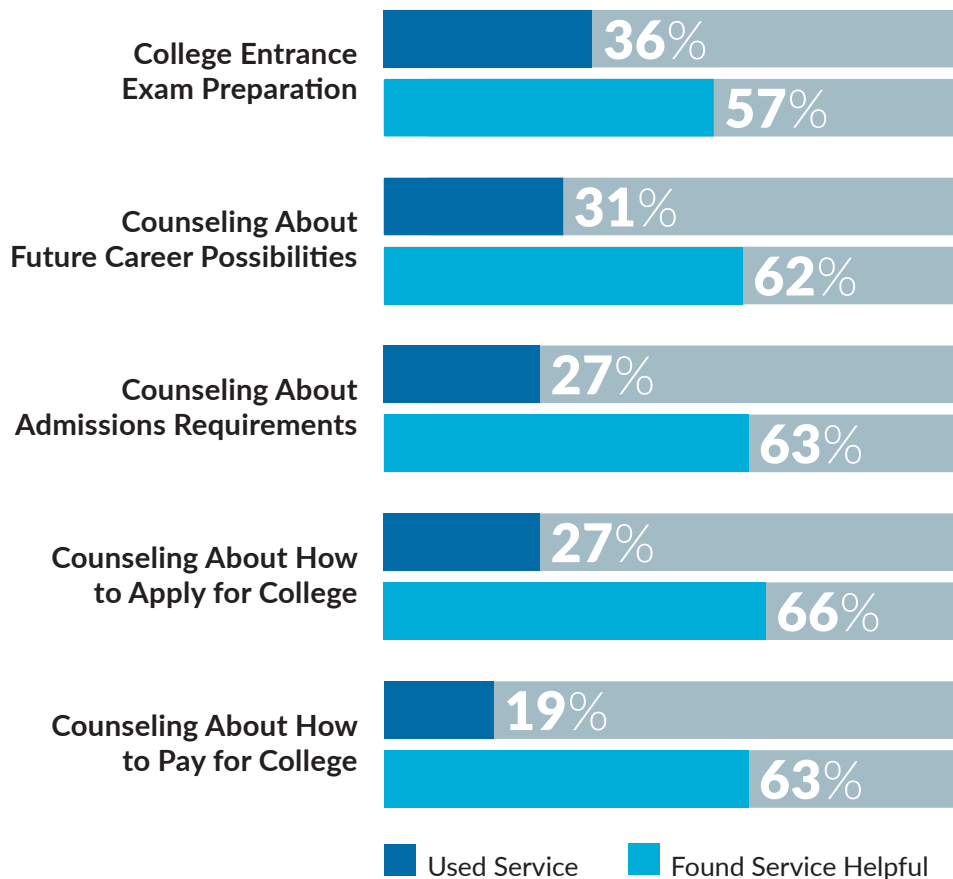
Anonymous High School Student

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Students find support services helpful — but most aren't using them.

What about support services that help students prepare for life after high school? When students access support services, they by and large find them to be helpful. On average, of the students who used support services, approximately 60 percent report that the services were helpful.

This is good news — though there is certainly room for improvement. More concerning, however, is that only about a third of students surveyed report actually *using* support services.

Have you participated in any of the following services at your school?

College Entrance Exam Preparation
- 36%
- 57%

Counseling About Future Career Possibilities
- 31%
- 62%

Counseling About Admissions Requirements
- 27%
- 63%

Counseling About How to Apply for College
- 27%
- 66%

Counseling About How to Pay for College
- 19%
- 63%

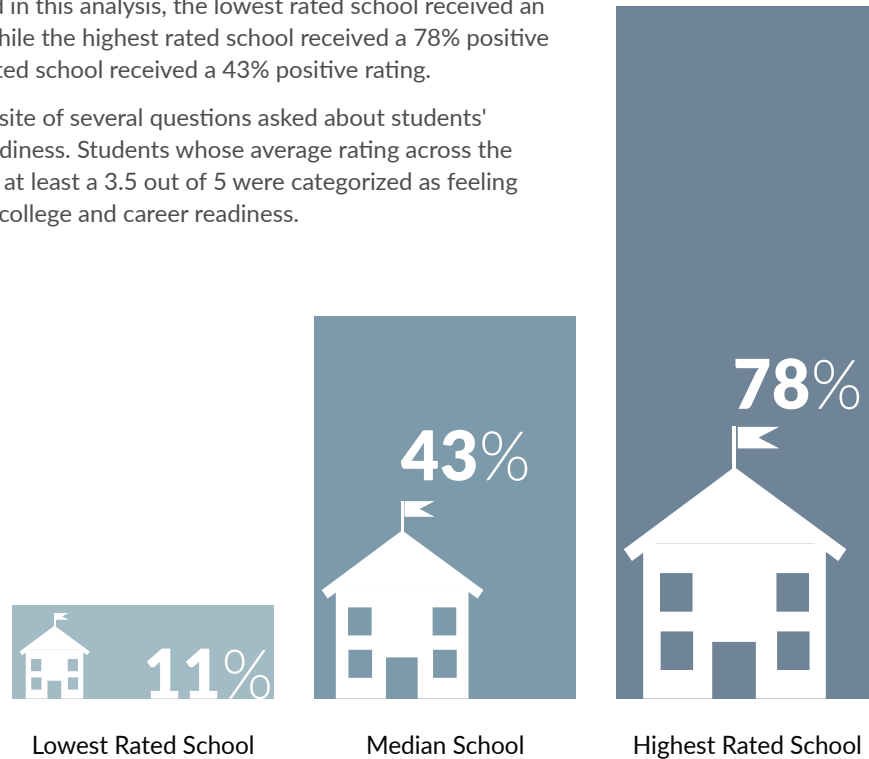■ Used Service ■ Found Service Helpful

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

The least accessed service is counseling about how to pay for college. This is especially concerning as cost is one of the top reasons cited for students dropping out of college. Understanding how to pay for college is vital for ensuring that students make it to *and* through college.

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Ratings of college and career readiness vary widely across schools. Of the 114 schools examined in this analysis, the lowest rated school received an 11% positive rating while the highest rated school received a 78% positive rating. The median-rated school received a 43% positive rating.

This rating is a composite of several questions asked about students' college and career readiness. Students whose average rating across the related questions was at least a 3.5 out of 5 were categorized as feeling positively about their college and career readiness.

11% Lowest Rated School

43% Median School

78% Highest Rated School

As students prepare to move into the world after high school, their elementary and secondary experiences lay a foundation for their future. The best way to understand how prepared students feel for college and career is to ask them directly. We believe that this data provides an important comparative context for understanding students' perceptions of their own college and career readiness.

Recent studies have shown that students who are not ready for college-level courses spend both time and money in remedial classes to catch up. Studies also show that students who have to take remedial classes are more likely to drop out. These findings highlight the need for educators to understand how to best support and prepare students before they graduate.

Asking students about their perceptions of college and career readiness, as well as their exposure to college and career preparation services, is crucial for understanding where to prioritize resources. When school leaders have actionable and timely insights into their students' experiences, they are better able to identify areas for growth and ensure that all students are prepared for life after high school.

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Resources for Students

ScholarMatcher
College search tool that allows students to explore potential schools.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Helps students determine the best options for financial aids, based on their profile.

BigFuture
Explains how to apply for financial aid, understand college costs, learn about loans, and search for scholarships.

College Board Net Price Calculator
Designed to help students get an early indication of how much and what types of financial aid they would receive at specific schools.

National College Access Network
Provides resources to help students narrow the list of colleges they are interested in and understand the procedures and requirements of the admissions process.

Research

- Bromberg, Marni, and Christina Theokas. "Meandering toward Graduation: Transcript Outcomes of High School Graduates." *Education Trust* (2016)

- Shulock, Nancy, and Patrick M. Callan. "Beyond the rhetoric: Improving college readiness through coherent state policy." *San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Southern Regional Education Board* (2010).

- Barry, Mary Nguyen, and Michael Dannenberg. "Out of Pocket: The High Cost of Inadequate High Schools and High School Student Achievement on College Affordability." *Education Reform Now* (2016).

- Jimenez, Laura, Scott Sargrad, Jessica Morales, and Maggie Thompson. "Remedial Education: The Cost of Catching Up." *Center for American Progress* (2016).

- Sparks, Dinah, and Nat Malkus. "First-Year Undergraduate Remedial Coursetaking: 1999-2000, 2003-04, 2007-08. Statistics in Brief. NCES 2013-013." *National Center for Education Statistics* (2013).

ABOUT YOUTHTRUTH

YouthTruth is a national nonprofit that harnesses student and stakeholder perceptions to help educators accelerate improvements. Through validated survey instruments and tailored advisory services, YouthTruth partners with schools, districts, and education funders to enhance learning for all students. To learn more about the research that informs our work, please visit www.youthtruthsurvey.org/resources.

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FOR PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Do you think these findings speak to the student experience at your school?

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How do you think students' perception of college and career readiness on your campus might be similar to or different from these findings? What sources inform your hypothesis?

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What questions do you have after reflecting on this data?

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What is one area in which your school is doing well at preparing students for college and career? What is one area in which you have room for growth?

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What college and career support services does your school offer?

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_____

Are students using college and career support services at your school? Why or why not?

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Closing the Feedback Loop:
Sample Discussion Questions

FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS IN CONVERSATION WITH STUDENTS

Do you think this data reflects the experiences of students at your school? Which data points seem most relevant?

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What resources have you found most helpful as you prepare for college and/or your future career?

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How can your school do a better job of letting students know about available resources?

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What questions do you have about preparing for life after high school?

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What is one thing that your school could try this year to help prepare students for college and career?

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